

TYPES OF DEMOCRACY

SWKT: Representative democracies can take several forms (participatory, pluralist, and elite)
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TERM	DEFINITION
democracy	a system of government in which the power of the government is vested in the people, who rule directly or through elected representatives
participatory democracy	emphasizes broad, direct participation in politics and civil society, in which most or all citizens participate in politics directly
pluralist democracy	political power rests with competing interest groups so that no one group dominates political decisions.
elite democracy	a small number of people, usually those who are wealthy and well-educated, influence political decision making

Participatory democracy in action: Participatory democracy is a model of democracy in which citizens have the power to make policy decisions. Participatory democracy emphasizes the broad participation of people in politics.

However, this is not a direct democracy, in which citizens are directly responsible for making policy decisions. In a participatory democracy, citizens can influence policy decisions, but do not make them. Politicians are still responsible for implementing those policy decisions. The United States does not have a pure participatory democracy, but at some levels of government, we can see examples of a participatory democracy playing out.

An example of participatory democracy can be seen in local and state forms of government, where citizens have multiple access points to influence policymakers. Town hall meetings are a way for local and national politicians to meet with constituents to hear their opinions on topics they are interested in or to discuss upcoming legislation.

Initiatives and referendums are two ways in which local and state governments allow for citizens to influence policy decisions. An initiative is a process that allows citizens to bypass their state legislature by placing proposed laws on the ballot. Some states even allow citizens to place constitutional amendments on the ballot.

Pluralist democracy in action: Pluralist democracy is the idea that policy-making is open to lots of groups who have different interests. Each of these groups has the potential to influence policy-making, but no one group dominates all political decisions.

An example of pluralist democracy in the United States today is the participation of interest groups like the National Rifle Association (NRA) and the National Organization for Women (NOW). Both of these groups raise funds for candidates, promote candidates, and strive to influence current members of Congress on political decisions. Interest groups are an example of pluralist democracy because citizens join groups to influence policy-makers, rather than having direct access to political decisions.

Elite democracy in action: Elite democracy is one in which a small subset of citizens makes political decisions. Those who make policy are usually wealthier and more educated than the average citizen. In an elite democracy, those who are in power are highly qualified to make political decisions.

An example of elite democracy today is the Electoral College. The Electoral College is used in presidential elections and determines the outcome of most elections. While a candidate might win the popular vote in an election (meaning more citizens voted to elect them than their opponent), they could lose the Electoral College vote, and thus the presidency. The Electoral College is intended to provide a check on voters and act as a safeguard in case the voters make an unwise decision for president.

PRACTICE QUESTIONS

1. Which of the following aspects of the U.S. Constitution best illustrates the concept of elite democracy?
 - (A) The original wording of the Constitution regarding the selection of U.S. senators
 - (B) The apportionment of representatives in the House according to state population
 - (C) The original wording of the Constitution regarding the selection of U.S. House representatives
 - (D) The process for adding amendments to the Constitution
2. An informal group advocating for a \$15 minimum wage collects 590,000 signatures from registered voters in their state. In the next election, this initiative appears on the ballot for voters to decide whether it becomes a state constitutional amendment. This is an example of which of the following models of democracy?
 - (A) Representative democracy
 - (B) Pluralist democracy
 - (C) Elite democracy
 - (D) Participatory democracy